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PER *J. Prechowsky* OFFICE

FADRC FOI CASE NO.

FROM : Amconsul MONTREAL

DATE: March 21, 1969

SUBJECT : Montreal Press Reaction to Anti-Ballistic-Missile System Debate

REF :

Montreal editorials on the ABM-System debate are summarized below. In summary, they reflect deep and growing Canadian concern with President Nixon's decision and the apparent absence of prior consultation between the United States and Canada. They favor serious talks on the subject when Prime Minister Trudeau visits President Nixon next week.

An editorial in The Gazette for March 17 pointed out that President Nixon, with a Republican minority in both the Senate and the House, had had to compromise on his ABM decision. "The most encouraging note," concluded The Gazette, "is that the program will move slowly and that it could be changed - if negotiations with Moscow make it possible."

In La Presse of March 19, Roger Champoux commented as follows:

"...Canada was not consulted in advance...What is more, the appropriate Canadian authorities were informed of [Washington's] grave decision exactly -- on the day before!...The Opposition...has not [been quiet in the Canadian Parliament] ... but Mr. Trudeau has not hesitated to say that during his coming visit with Mr. Nixon (March 24 and 25) the thorny problem will be raised in the course of discussions.

"The problem is complex...Mr. Nixon has to deal with the American General Staff, which...is proving insistent...The technical aspect is so complex that only the specialists can deal with the subject before well-informed audiences, whether to defend it or denounce it. [The political aspect] concerns us from many points of view...

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"...We do not belong to the sinister ['atomic club'], and yet the drama, if it were ever played, could very well affect us.

"The military say that they cannot worry about an imaginary line called the border when it is a question of intercepting a missile coming from another part of the globe. The technicians [have their say about locations] ...The irritating point remains: the absence of [political] consultations...A strictly military problem becomes a political dilemma, with President Nixon surprised, not to say astonished, by the breadth of anti-ABM pressure. On the other side there must be no less than 15,000 American industries that await the White House signal to get to work. Forty billion dollars! Some contract! ...World peace is expensive: it pays too.

"It will be a close game for Canada. At stake is its security, assured by its neighbor's colossal effort. The coming Trudeau-Nixon talks will thus not be a conventional horizon-tour. It is natural for us to be concerned about the location of two bases near our borders, but it is equally natural for neighbors to reach agreement on the necessity of a common protection..."

In an editorial published on March 20 in Le Devoir, its influential French-Canadian editor, Claude Ryan, refers to an article by Professor James Eayrs in the Toronto Star on March 18 concerning the danger to world peace of President Nixon's decision on a new line of defense against nuclear weapons in the north of the United States. Ryan goes on to assert that the location of the new bases means that Canada could become a nuclear battlefield in case of an exchange between Russia or China and the United States. There should have been consultations, if not a bilateral agreement, he says, but "all indications are that there was none of that, and that Canada was once more taken for granted by its all-powerful neighbor." With this Safeguard program and the NORAD agreements, he adds, "Canada is inextricably involved in a network of decisions of which the most important are one-way without true consultation." All this adds a particular note of urgency and gravity to Mr. Trudeau's forthcoming visit to Washington. He ought to inform President Nixon, Ryan concludes, "that it can no longer be acceptable for Canada to evolve as a powerless and docile satellite within a defense system where consultation is too often a one-way affair, i.e. in terms of the political concepts and priority interests of the most powerful partner."

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Adjoining the Ryan editorial is a caricature of President Nixon building a fence of barbed wire strung on missile-shaped posts. It is captioned "The New Frontier." On the same day in Montréal-Matin, another morning paper, there is a cartoon showing a small exhibit of missiles, anti-missiles, and anti-anti-missiles - all but two marked "U.S.A." - and the exhibitor, with reference to one which is not marked "U.S.A.", saying to a visitor: "It is not ours. We are a peaceful people. It's being kept for 'chums'."

On the afternoon of March 20, The Montreal Star ran a brief editorial praising Mr. Trudeau for saying that much more is at stake in the debate over the ABM decision than the safety or peril of some Canadian cities. "The way to security does not rest in the piling up of missile systems or anti-missile systems," concluded the editorialist, "it lies rather in negotiating with all possible speed a drastic reduction in the total spending on defence, the destruction of both missiles and anti-missiles already far too numerous."

Both La Presse and The Montreal Star on March 20 carried top front-page stories on the ABM debate. Headlines read "CANADA COULD PARTICIPATE IN THE 'SENTINEL' NETWORK" (La Presse) and "Missile System Defended, Decried - ABM BATTLE GROWS IN CANADA, U.S." (Star). Le Devoir also front-paged the debate: "P.E. TRUDEAU DOES NOT EXCLUDE CANADA'S PARTICIPATION IN ABM SYSTEM."

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